

Time won't forget Frank McKechnie

Rob Beintema, a staff photographer and occasional writer for The Mississauga News, wrote this column about Frank McKechnie in 1984. With the death of the Ward 5 councillor last week, we thought re-running the piece would be a fitting tribute.



**ROB
BEINTEMA**

Guest
column

One cold morning just after Christmas, I turned into McKechnie Court to visit with the namesake of that street, Frank McKechnie, the councillor for Ward 5. My editor had sent me to snap a photo of the "Mayor of Malton", the man who has successfully held onto his riding longer than any politician in Mississauga. The dawning of 1984 marks Frank's 25th consecutive year in office, quite a milestone for anyone in politics.

Frank met me at the door and invited me in. I asked if we could take the shot at the end of the road, beneath the street sign bearing his name. As he dressed to go outside, he said he wasn't sure whether he should wear the new fur and leather coat his wife had bought him for Christmas.

"I really like it," he grinned, "but my son was over for Christmas and he said it looked like something a pimp would wear." I told Frank it was up to him. He thought about it, then grabbed his old sheepskin coat and a hat.

As we walked down the street, we discussed the photograph to mark his 25th year in office. Reaching the signpost, he stepped into the snow, turned and faced me, his arms hanging at his sides.

Some of the glossier politicians are very photographically aware, consciously striking poses whenever a camera is aimed anywhere near them. Others are like the rest of us, they stiffen and don't know quite how to stand. Frank is one of the latter. He stood awkwardly rigid, unsure of where to put his hands. I asked him to turn a bit, cross his arms and relax.

As I looked through the viewfinder, I noticed the shadows of Frank and the signpost mixing in the background, liked the pattern and shifted to keep them in the picture. Those aren't the only shadows Frank McKechnie has had behind him over the years, when you think of the long list of contenders that have tried in vain to wrest political office from his grasp.

We took a few shots, made some changes in angle and position and Frank relaxed enough for me to get the picture I wanted. As we started back up the street, we made some small talk about Malton, its changes and rapid growth in the past few years.

"How old are you?" he asked me. I told him. He nodded. "I thought you were under 30. So you were only 4 years old when I started." He thought about that for a second, "It sure doesn't seem that long," he added.

I thanked him for his time and we parted at my car.

As I drove down the street and stopped by the signpost again, I remembered something I'd mentioned to him. There were two street names on the signpost by the intersection. The one above McKechnie Court read Twilight St. In light of his 25 years of service, those two names in the photo had struck me as quite a coincidence. Frank seemed somewhat surprised over the connection I had made. But, as he said, 25 years doesn't seem that long after it's passed. I don't think he considers himself to be in the twilight of his career.

I drove out of the street wondering if maybe in another 10 years some other photographer would arrive on a similar assignment, notice the two signs, and make the same connection. Maybe it would fit better then. But then again, by that time maybe someone will have renamed the other road Frank St.

Author's note: I wrote this column in early '84.

And Frank was right. He certainly wasn't in the twilight of his career at the time. Instead, he went on to serve his constituents for more than another dozen years. And while the legacy of his work and dedication may live on as Mississauga swells its boundaries, this growing busy city will miss the home-spun charm and small-town geniality of Councillor Frank McKechnie.

